

- Reading the Bible we realize that the desert features strongly in the background to Jesus' life. Many times Jesus went to the desert to be alone. The desert with all its bleak landscape seemed to be the place where Jesus could revive Himself, get his energy back, become refreshed, ready to go again. In the desert He had no distractions. There were no crowds following Him. There He had time to think, to pray, catch up on his sleep, relax. Sometimes Jesus spent many days in the desert. Once He lived there for 40 days fasting and praying. In the middle of this quiet place Jesus was tempted by the Devil.
- It seems to me that for anybody who lives near a desert landscape the desert is going to feature in their lives one way or another. We all can't be so lucky to live near a desert if we want to be like Jesus. We have to use the landscape that is given us. For example, from the Western European tradition monks and nuns chose to live their monastic lives on the edge of the ocean with huge Atlantic winds bashing them against the rocks. The wild Atlantic landscape became their desert place. This is where they went to find faith in God. Other ascetical people climbed high into the mountains to find their deserts.
- Maybe it is unfortunate for us but we live in the city. What are we supposed to do with that? Our desert landscape will have to be the neighborhood we are living in. How on earth can I find God in the middle of traffic, people, and noise? Is it possible to deepen my faith in this environment? Let us be reminded not all the holy people of this world live in deserts, or on cliff tops or high in the mountains. Holy people live in South Austin as well. The one thing all spiritual people have in common, no matter what the landscape, is that they are all searching for God. They are able to find God in a place where there is no distraction.
- If I want to get close to God I have to go to the quiet. Turning off the radio, the television, and the smart phone is not silence and it is not quiet. Sitting on a bench in the park is not quiet. The problem is not the place. It is not the quiet. My problem is that I have to get going. I have to clean something. I have to eat something. I have to read. I can't go to God without chocolate. I wonder what's on television. I'm sorry God but I have to be doing something. My way is to take out my bible, or my Lenten reflection book, or my prayer book, or my beads, maybe I will light a scented candle, maybe I will dim the lights, maybe I will play soft music...and it goes on and on. I never get close to God because I have surrounded myself with a hundred rituals and magic tricks to get in the mood.
- Let me just sit. Let me become still. Let me empty. No more distractions. Deep within. Let me stay there. Every time I want to say Hi to Jesus let me shut my mouth. Let me reduce. There is nothing only air. Then I wait and then God comes. No, I don't have to say Hi to Our Lady either. I am not in a hurry. I do not expect anything. It is what it is.

The problem for us is that being still and doing nothing seems impossible. We learned from the beginning that we must be productive, we must do something.

- I might give this a title: “Wasting time with God.” Isn’t that what lovers do all the time. They just spend their days gazing into each other’s eyes. They just sit doing nothing and they are perfectly happy. I am trying to spend time with my lover. Only in this case my lover is the Lord Jesus. The quiet place where we can be together becomes the desert, even though the winds are blowing outside, even though there is traffic and noise everywhere. This is the place where Jesus went to be with His loving Father in Heaven. By doing nothing He found strength, purpose, focus, vision, clarity. During the season of Lent we are invited to do the same.
- Maybe we could allow the concluding prayer at Mass today be our inspiration: “Let us be renewed with heavenly bread. Let our faith be nourished. Let our hope increase. Let our charity be strengthened. May we learn to hunger for Christ because He is the true and living Bread. May we strive to live my every word which proceeds from His mouth.” Let that be enough.